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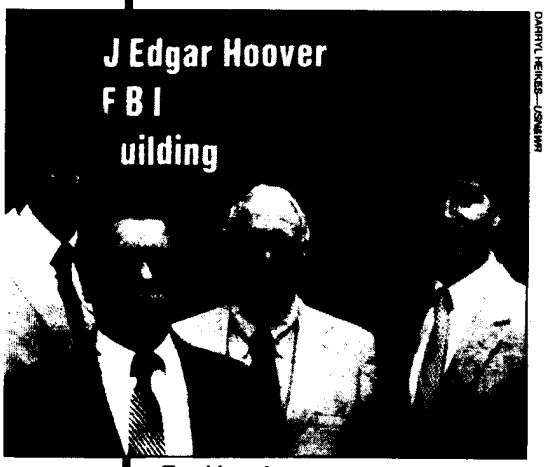
A Memo to Our Readers

They don't face as much danger, but reporters who cover espionage activities often require as much imagination, initiative and detective instincts as do characters in a Robert Ludlum novel.

Orr Kelly, who has kept watch over intelligence agencies for 20 years, says the secret is to find such sources as former intelligence agents or experts on Capitol Hill. "When you get a good tip, you go back to the intelligence agency and say, 'I hear this—do you have any response?' Sometimes that will provoke an answer."



DARRYL HEIKES—USN&WR

Tracking down cover story are, left to right, David Whitman, Joe Fromm, Orr Kelly and Bob Kittle.

For our special report, "How Soviets Steal America's Secrets," staff members talked to scores of experts about the dangers the U.S. faces from espionage and what we are doing to combat it. We looked extensively, as well, at the smuggling of high-tech information to the U.S.S.R.

"I was surprised at how sophisticated buyers and sellers of secrets are at getting information out of the country," says Robert Dudney, who wrote the high-tech story. "There are false fronts, dummy companies and post-office boxes—a regular hall of mirrors."

David Whitman, who wrote the espionage story, says he was struck by the number of Americans with security clearances—4.3 million—and how hard it is to define which will be potential risks. Bob Kittle reported on tighter Pentagon procedures.

The project was supervised by Assistant Editor Joe Fromm, whose intelligence background goes back to World War II, when he served in the Indian Army. Fromm developed close intelligence ties while covering postwar Japan, Israel, Britain and the United States. In fact, the Soviets tried unsuccessfully to recruit Fromm as an undercover agent in the late 1940s, and the British tried in the 1960s. He reported the Soviet offer to U.S. authorities and angrily rejected the British.

Out of curiosity, we asked our staffers what spy novels they read and were surprised to find that they rarely look at them. Says Kelly: "The danger in them is exaggerated. Most bear little relation to reality."

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